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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Arab NGO Network for Development, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Bahrain: Grave Abuses of Human Rights Continue*

From the last session of the Human Rights Council in March 2015, to the current 29th session, Bahrain witnessed further erosion of human rights and deterioration of civil society space and violation of Bahrain's human rights commitments and obligations deriving from core human rights treaties Bahrain is party to.

Since the last HRC session, the most alarming development occurred on 10 March 2015, with the outbreak of violence and use of excessive force by security forces at Jaw Prison where political and rights prisoners are held. While photos, videos and testimonies of prisoners released or still in detention reflect the violations, abuses are still going on through denial of medication of the wounded and sick, crowdedness, accommodation in tents, contagious skin disease and denial of visitation for many.

Bahrain continues to undermine legal political life as well by targeting the licensed political organizations. For instance, the largest political and opposition party, Alwefaq which secured 62% of votes in the parliamentary elections of 2010, with 18 MPs out of 40 MPs of the House of Representative, has been denied repeatedly to hold its Conference and its political figures have been targeted. More alarming is the prosecution of AlWefaq leaders for their statements alleged to incite hatred against the state, intentionally disseminating false news that threatens public peace and homeland security, call for illegal marches, and indignation of the Ministry of Interior. The Secretary General, Sh. Ali Salman, who was summoned to interrogation on 28 December 2014 and held since then, has been interrogated repeatedly, till now. When his trial was held on January 2015, he was charged with plotting to topple down the regime, and promoting defiance of laws, hatred of the state and false news that destabilize the country. Since then his trial has been going and the coming session is expected to be on 26 May 2016. The second opposition organization, WAAD, has been targeted also. The Ministry of Justice, pressurized WAAD, to drop membership of its Secretary General , Mr Ebrahim Sharef, serving 5 years imprisonment on phony charges. The other aspect of undermining legitimate political activities has been sanctioning licensed demonstrations ,and meeting for the last 6 months. This forced public to unlicensed demonstrations and meetings which have been quelled with excessive force resulting in hundreds of causalities and arrests.

Moreover, while the recent UN resolution on civil society space[1] emphasized the problematic of domestic legal and administrative provisions, such as national security and counter-terrorism legislation, and other measures, such as provisions on funding to civil society being misused to hinder the work of civil society, such practices in Bahrain remain. This requires the Council to closely follow the situation on the ground; given that foreign funding to independent organizations is restricted, and with the latest amendments on the law on Clubs and Society, dual membership of political organization and NGO, the dual membership of sport union and NGO, the membership of NGO Board and another NGO are denied.

The mass denaturalization of indigenous Bahrainis (72 lately), on phony charges continue to target political and rights activists, both in and outside Bahrain. Consequently the majority became stateless, where the government charges them with illegal residence, and deny them of basic rights in education, work , health, identification documents ...etc. Freedom of expression including those of social media has been restricted as well where tweets lead to minimum 6 months imprisonment; given the cases of human rights activists such as Mr. Nabil Rajab, Nader Abdulemam and Ms. Ghada Jamshir, who were sentenced to imprisonment.

Bahraini Government's practices against the enjoyment of legitimate political and civil rights including freedom of association, freedom of expression, and freedom of belief have been closely monitored by the OHCHR and the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon as well, where the former noted that "opposition parties are fundamental pillars of any democracy and Sheikh Salman's arrest risks intensifying the fraught political scene that has seen anti-government protests for nearly four years[2]."

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[1] http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/27/L.24

[2] http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15461&LangID=E

In this context, we call the UN Human Rights Council members to urge the Government of Bahrain to cooperate with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteurs on Torture, Human Rights Defenders and Freedom of Association and immediately implement the recommendations put forward during the country's Universal Periodic Review in 2012, as well as by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry in 2011, to ensure freedom of expression and assembly and to immediately release of all persons convicted or detained for merely exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

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*Bahrain Human Rights Observatory NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.